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TAGS: [PREL](#) [UNSC](#) [BU](#) [HU](#) [LO](#) [RO](#) [JA](#)
SUBJECT: JAPAN,S FOREIGN MINISTER VISITS EASTERN EUROPE

Classified By: Ambassador J. Thomas Schieffer for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Foreign Minister Taro Aso's January 9-14 trip to Eastern Europe demonstrated Japan's increasing global focus, said a MOFA official during a January 16 meeting. In addition to promoting stability via economic development and exchanges, Japan took advantage of the trip to build support for addressing North Korean issues and obtaining a permanent seat for Japan on the UN Security Council. End Summary.

Building the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity

¶2. (C) Japan is opening a new front in diplomacy, MOFA Central and South Eastern Europe Division Deputy Director Hiroki Takabayashi told Embassy Tokyo Political Officer on January 16. Historically, Japan's diplomatic strategy has focused on the U.S.-Japan alliance and Asia, but FM Aso's November 2006 speech delineated Japan's new policy objective: building an "Arc of Freedom and Prosperity" around the periphery of the Eurasian continent. The arc starts in Europe, then passes through Southeast Europe, South and Central Asia, Southeast Asia, and up into North Korea, explained Takabayashi, admitting that it was more like a "dotted line" at this point. FM Aso's January 9-14 trip to Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Slovakia was intended to "promote Japan's worldwide diplomacy," stated Takabayashi, noting that all four countries were recent additions to either NATO or the EU. This was the first cabinet-level Japanese visitor to Romania and Bulgaria since 1983, when then-FM Shintaro Abe (the current Prime Minister's father) visited the region. The 2007 visit was the first ever by a cabinet member to Slovakia, and the first to Hungary since ¶1995.

¶3. (C) FM Aso also used the East Europe tour to elicit support for Japan's global agenda, Takabayashi continued. Aso asked the four countries to help pressure the North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons program and resolve the abduction of Japanese citizens. Japan also recognizes that support from European countries is critical to its bid for a permanent UN Security Council seat, explained Takabayashi. In addition, the Japanese Foreign Minister conveyed Japan's intention to strengthen Japan-NATO cooperation, according to Takabayashi.

Hungary and Slovakia

¶4. (C) In Budapest and Bratislava, Aso focused on further developing economic relations and on expanding cultural exchanges. Japan already has strong economic ties with Hungary and The Slovak Republic, which have both encouraged Japanese foreign direct investment (FDI) since joining the EU, according to Takabayashi. In addition, Japan made plans

with Hungary and The Slovak Republic to use the V4 Japan framework as a basis for organizing a ministerial meeting in the coming months (Visegrad 4 - The Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and The Slovak Republic).

15. (C) Japan found common ground with Hungary and The Slovak Republic on a variety of international issues. When the Slovakian Prime Minister brought up Japan-China relations, FM Aso used the opportunity to lobby against the EU lifting its army embargo on China. The Slovak Republic stated its agreement with Japan's position on EU arms embargo, and Takabayashi reported that both The Slovak Republic and Hungary expressed support for Japan's UNSC aspirations as well.

Romania and Bulgaria: Graduation Day

16. (C) Romania and Bulgaria are still receiving Japanese Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) and used the Aso visit to request additional loans. In both countries, Japan agreed to one final "graduation" loan, but will expect the relationship to transition from donor-recipient to "equal partnership," said Takabayashi. In Bucharest and Sofia, Aso also laid the groundwork for purchasing pollution credits under the Kyoto Protocol framework. Both countries pledged their support for Japan as a permanent UNSC member.

17. (C) Comment: Aso's visit to Eastern Europe marks a significant step in Japan's foreign policy, particularly when viewed together with Prime Minister Abe's almost simultaneous visit to Western Europe. The Foreign Minister's call for promotion of the "Arc of Freedom and Prosperity" has MOFA officials looking for diplomatic and programmatic opportunities throughout Eurasia. By promoting itself as an active participant in global issues, Japan hopes to be recognized not just for its checkbox diplomacy, but as a serious "player" worthy of a permanent UNSC seat.
SCHIEFFER